REYNOLDS

BY

RANDALL DAVIES

This is a sketch of Sir Joshua's career as a painter, with special regard to the circumstances in which it developed. The art of painting in England at the commencement of the reign of George II. was at its lowest ebb. Half a century later it had risen to heights which it had never reached before. How much of this improvement can be attributed to Sir Joshua Reynolds can only be understood by learning something of the character of the man, the thoroughness with which he undertook anything entrusted to him, and his dignified manner of conducting affairs. The institution of the Royal Academy might have meant little in the history of English painting had it not been for the broad and firm character of its first President, and the ability with which he advanced the art, both by practice and precept.

(1923)

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REYNOLDS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

ROMNEY

Containing sixteen examples
of the master's work

VELASQUEZ

Containing sixteen examples
of the master's work

A. AND C. BLACK, 4 SOHO SQUARE, LONDON, W.

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MISS NELLY O'BRIEN

1763. Wallace Collection, London

REYNOLDS

BY

RANDALL DAVIES

CONTAINING SIXTEEN EXAMPLES IN COLOUR
OF THE MASTER'S WORK

LONDON
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PREFACE

THE chief authorities on the life and work of Reynolds are James Northcote, R.A., his most successful pupil; Henry William Beechey, and C. R. Leslie, R.A., each of whom produced a two-volume work on the subject. The first of these appeared in 1819, seventeen years after Sir Joshua's death; the next in 1835, and the last, edited by Tom Taylor, in 1865.

Besides these capital works there are memoirs by Joseph Farington, R.A., by Edmund Malone, by William Cotton, by William Mason, and by Allan Cunningham in his "Lives of the British Painters," all of which appeared in the earlier half of the last century.

From such an abundance of material, to say nothing of modern publications, it is hardly possible to collect everything that is of value within the

limits of a short memoir. Only such points as are in themselves essential, or seem significant in relation to the enormous influence of Reynolds on his contemporaries, has it been attempted to dwell upon.

R. D.

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SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

When Benjamin West, a native of Pennsylvania, was elected President of the Royal Academy, on the death of Reynolds in 1792, he found the arts in a state of prosperity which could hardly have been predicted when Reynolds began painting in London just half a century earlier. To attribute this happy improvement to his illustrious predecessor alone would have been more than was fair to West himself, and in giving to Sir Joshua the fullest credit for his share in it, the claims of one or two great painters and of more lesser lights than can readily be counted must not be overlooked. But, when all have been fairly considered, it is to Reynolds that the highest tribute is due for having helped, by precept as well as by practice, to raise the arts from the low estate in which he found them at the outset of his career to the proud position in which they stood at the close of the eighteenth century. "He was the first Englishman," said Edmund

Burke, "who added the praise of the elegant arts to the other glories of his country."

Looking back, as we now may, over the whole extent of British painting in the eighteenth century, we may say still more than this, namely that while others practised the profession of painting Reynolds dignified it. Painting in England had never been an art, it was little more than a business; and there was small hope of it ever becoming anything better when a really considerable painter like Kneller was content simply to fill his pockets from the profits of an emporium for fashionable portraits without caring in the least as to their quality so long as he got his price.

Kneller, however, was a German. What was wanted for English Art was an Englishman. Sir James Thornhill, and his forceful son-in-law, William Hogarth, were both bold and successful in attempting what they could, each in his particular way, to root the plant in the soil. But neither had the necessary combination of those two qualities, greatness and dignity, which was essential for effecting so great a task as bringing the plant to maturity. Thornhill had the dignity without the greatness, Hogarth something of the greatness without the

CAPTAIN ORME

1761. National Gallery, London

dignity; and it was left to Reynolds, in whom these two qualities, abundantly evident, were blended in such nice proportions, to foster, if not to found, one of the most vigorous schools of painting that the world has ever seen.

Dignity, it may be observed, is a dangerous quality when not accompanied, or alloyed, by others more human. If not nicely balanced it is only too liable to swerve to pomposity on the one hand, or empty affability or condescension on the other. That Reynolds never swayed perceptibly in either direction it would hardly be true to assert. His pedantic observations on his great contemporaries, Hogarth, Gainsborough and Wilson, and the patronising tone of some of his conversations with the younger men, would be less forgivable were it not that one realises how great a man he was. There are many passages in his Discourses that, taken by themselves, are apt to exasperate; but when we consider the work he actually accomplished, the example he afforded, and the knowledge of his art which by his application he added to his natural gifts, we cannot fail to see how paramount his influence has been on the whole course of English Art in his own and succeeding times.

That he was an Englishman is a fact which nowadays it may seem unnecessary to emphasise. But how easy it is to forget that a very considerable number of the painters whose works are included in those of "the British School" were not born in England. That the very greatest of all were natives—namely, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Hogarth, Romney, Lawrence, Constable and Turner—is certainly gratifying to the national pride; and it may be added that with the exception of Romney all of these were born south of the Trent. Scotland has given us Raeburn, and Wales Richard Wilson. But with the exception of the miniaturists, Isaac and Peter Oliver, Nicholas Hilyard and Samuel Cooper, there was no English artist of note before the eighteenth century; the influence of Holbein, Vandyke, Lely, Kneller, and the rest who worked in England, was never strong enough to awaken a response in the country of their adoption. In later and modern times the British School has been enriched from various quarters: by West, Copley, Whistler, Abbey, and Sargent from across the Atlantic; by Alma Tadema from Holland and Hubert von Herkomer from Germany, to mention only a few of the more notable names. But the

THE STRAWBERRY GIRL

1773. Wallace Collection, London

number of British artists is now so great, to say nothing of their strength, that these accessions count for little in the great stream whose fountain-head, to return to the point from which we start, was Joshua Reynolds.

It was at Plympton in Devonshire that Reynolds was born, on July 16, 1723. His father, the Rev. Samuel Reynolds, was headmaster of a school in the parish. His mother's maiden name was Theophila Potter. He was the tenth of eleven children — no uncommon number for a country

From the Painting by] "MUSCIPULA." [Sir Joshua Reynolds.

He is said to have been called
on of possible benevolence from
me who lived in the neighbour-
s was an afterthought, for his
n the register of baptisms at
.

not most, of his fellow-geniuses
e for the arts at a very early age.
hat lack of foresight which may
characteristic of parents, is known
one of his son's earliest efforts,
chool-hours, "Done by Joshua out
" "His first essays," Malone tells us, "were copying some slight drawings made by

two of his sisters, who had a turn for art; he afterwards eagerly copied such prints as he met with among his father's books, particularly those which were given in the translation of Plutarch's lives published by Dryden. But his principal fund of imitation was Jacob Catts's Book of Emblems, which his great-grandmother by the father's side, a Dutchwoman, had brought with her from Holland."

Trivial as these anecdotes of early efforts may in very many cases be held, it is here of the very greatest interest to compare the beginnings of Reynolds's genius with those of his only formidable rival, Gainsborough. For in both we so plainly see "the child the father of the man" that, were it not that we have both of the accounts on sufficiently trustworthy authority, we might well suppose them to have been supplied merely to feed the popular imagination of what ought to have been. "A beautiful wood of four miles in extent," Allan Cunningham tells us, "was Gainsborough's first inspiration when but a child, in Suffolk. Scenes are pointed out where he used to sit and fill his copy-books with pencillings of flowers, and trees, and whatever pleased his fancy; and it is said that these early attempts of the child bore a distinct resem-

LADY COCKBURN AND HER CHILDREN

1773. National Gallery, London

blance to the mature works of the man. At ten years old he had made some progress in sketching, and at twelve he was a confirmed painter."

Reynolds's father was not long, however, in awaking to Joshua's talents, for the boy was not more than about eight years old when, after perusing a book entitled "The Jesuit's Perspective," he made a drawing of Plympton School which effected a complete revolution in the state of the parental mind. "This is what the author of the 'Perspective' asserts in his preface," cried the worthy father, "that by observing the rules laid down in this book a man may do wonders—for this is wonderful!"

After this portentous revelation Joshua was allowed to devote himself more seriously to his favourite pursuit, and his classical studies were sacrificed to the more congenial occupation of drawing likenesses of his relations and friends, and to the perusal of Richardson's treatise on painting, which gave him his first acquaintance with the beauties of the great Italian Masters.

To the author of this work, Jonathan Richardson the elder, some slight tribute is due in speaking of the formation and development of the English School of Painting, so far at all events as it was influenced

by the study of the Italian Masters. Horace Walpole considered him one of the best painters of a head that had appeared in this country. "There is strength, roundness, and boldness in his colouring," he says, "but his men want dignity and his women grace. The good sense of the nation is characterised in his portraits. You see he lived in an age when neither enthusiasm nor servility were predominant." The treatise of Richardson in which Reynolds formed his first acquaintance with the Italian Masters was probably the "Essay on the whole Art of Criticism as it relates to Painting," which was published in 1719, bound up in one volume with "An Argument in behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur." This was followed, in 1722, by an account of some of the statues, bas-reliefs, drawings, and pictures in Italy, &c., with remarks by Mr. Richardson, Senior and Junior. The son made the journey, and from his notes they both compiled this valuable work. The father formed a large collection of the drawings of Old Masters, many of which were acquired and treasured by Reynolds.

When he was eighteen years old, Reynolds was sent to London to study painting under Thomas Hudson, the most successful portrait painter at that

MISS BOWLES

1775. Wallace Collection, London

time, with whom he remained for two years. It is said that the relations between master and pupil were not very happy, and that the reason for Reynolds's abrupt return to Devonshire was the success of one of his portraits which had been hung by accident among Hudson's productions. However this may be, it appears that Reynolds had not wasted his time in London, and it was during the next two or three years, when he had returned to his native country and settled at Plymouth, that he painted the portrait of himself (with his palette in his left hand, shading his eyes with his right), besides being commissioned to paint Miss Chudleigh, afterwards the notorious Duchess of Kingston, and the Commissioner of Plymouth Dock.

Northcote speaks of Reynolds's pictures at this early period as being "carelessly drawn and frequently in commonplace attitudes, like those of his old master Hudson, with one hand hid in the waistcoat, and the hat under the arm—a very favourite attitude with portrait painters at that time, because particularly convenient to the artist, as by it he got rid of the tremendous difficulty of painting the hand." Apropos of which Northcote proceeds to relate an anecdote which he says he had heard so often and on such authority that he apprehended it to be a truth :

modore of the Mediterranean station, and invited Reynolds to accompany him. He willingly accepted the invitation, and remained in Italy for over three years. How he profited by this opportunity for studying the works of the greatest masters may be gathered from numerous passages in his memoranda and in the "Discourses;" and to discover the secret of his success, both in practice and in precept, we have only to read in his own words the story of the ceaseless activity of a mind unalterably bent on utilising every opportunity for improving his art. Let us begin with the passage in which he confesses to have found himself disappointed with the works of Raphael. "I did not for a moment conceive or suppose," he writes, "that the name of Raphael and those admirable paintings in particular owed their reputation to the ignorance and prejudice of mankind; on the contrary, my not relishing them as I was conscious I ought to have done was one of the most humiliating circumstances that ever happened to me: I found myself in the midst of works executed upon principles with which I was unacquainted; I felt my ignorance and stood abashed.

"All the indigested notions of painting which I had brought with me from England, where art was in

PORTRAIT OF TWO GENTLEMEN

1778. National Gallery, London

the lowest state it had ever been in (it could not, indeed, be lower), were to be totally done away and eradicated from my mind. It was necessary, as it is expressed on a very solemn occasion, that I should become *as a little child*."

Ignorance, then, was the first obstacle to be overcome. It was ignorance, as Beechey so truly points out in the introduction to his Memoir of Reynolds, ignorance of the dignity and creative powers of art, that made the works of his predecessors inferior to those of modern times; and it was the light derived from intellectual sources, operating upon a powerful and discriminating mind, that enabled him to attain a higher degree of excellence. "We may fairly assume," Beechey continues, "that the productions of this admirable painter gave the first great stimulus to British art and showed to British artists the extent of their deficiencies and the means by which they might be remedied . . . but we may venture to affirm that if he had never enjoyed the opportunities of comparing the results of his early education with the works of Italian genius, he would never have attained that high superiority which is now so universally allowed to him . . . it was the study

George Morland—who were gifted with one or other of those two qualities only; but the combination of the two carried Reynolds as high as Gainsborough, and far higher than any one else. "One who has a genius," he writes (as early as 1759), "will comprehend in his idea the whole of his work at once; whilst he who is deficient in genius amuses himself in trifling parts of small consideration, attends with scrupulous exactness to the minuter matters only, which he finishes to a nicety, whilst the whole together has a very ill effect."

This striving after generalisation, seeing things whole, is noticed by Edmund Burke as almost the chief characteristic of Reynolds's genius. Malone requested Burke to "throw his thoughts on paper relative to Sir Joshua," at the time when he was preparing his Life, and Burke complied with the request in the following short summary, which is printed in Leslie and Taylor's Life of Sir Joshua.

"He was a great generaliser, and was fond of reducing everything to one system; more, perhaps, than the variety of principles which operate in the human mind, and in every human work, will properly endure. But this disposition to abstractions, generalisations and classifications is the great glory

MRS. CARNAC

177?. Wallace Collection, London

of the human mind; that, indeed, which most distinguishes man from other animals, and is the source of everything that can be called science.

"I believe his early acquaintance with Mr. Mudge, of Exeter [the Rev. Zachariah Mudge, a dissenting minister], a very learned and thinking man, much inclined to philosophise in the spirit of the Platonists, disposed him to this habit. He certainly by that means liberalised in a high degree the theory of his own art; and if he had been more methodically instituted in the early part of his life, and had possessed more leisure for study and reflection, he would in my opinion have pursued this method with great success.

"He had a strong turn for humour, and well saw the weak sides of things. He enjoyed every circumstance of his good fortune and had no affectation on that subject. And I do not know a fault or weakness of his that he did not convert into something that bordered on a virtue, instead of pushing it to the confines of a vice. E. B."

"Genius," Johnson wrote, "is chiefly exerted in historical pictures, and the art of the painter of portraits is often lost in the obscurity of the subject. But it is in painting as in life: what is greatest is not

always best. I should grieve to see Reynolds transfer to heroes and to goddesses, to empty splendour and to airy fiction, that art which is now employed in diffusing friendship, in renewing tenderness, in quickening the affections of the absent and continuing the presence of the dead. Every man is always present to himself, and has therefore little need of his own resemblance ; nor can he desire it but for the sake of those whom he loves and by whom he hopes to be remembered. This use of the art is a natural and reasonable consequence of affection, and though, like all other human actions, it is often complicated with pride, yet even such pride is more laudable than that by which palaces are covered with pictures that, however excellent, neither imply the owner's virtue nor excite it."

This was written to combat the assertion that Sir Joshua, in confining himself to portraiture, was hardly practising what he was always preaching. But preaching was very much wanted at this stage of the development of art in England, though not exactly the preaching of the Established Church. The Dean of Gloucester had said on the occasion of a meeting of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, that he thought a pinmaker was a more useful and valu-

able member of society than Raphael. Reynolds was of the contrary opinion, which he committed to paper :

"This is an observation of a very narrow mind ; a mind that is confined to the mere object of commerce ; that sees with a microscopic eye but a part of the great machine of the economy of life, and thinks that small part which he sees to be the whole.

"Commerce is the means, not the end, of happiness or pleasure. The end is a rational enjoyment of life by means of arts and sciences. It is therefore the highest degree of folly to set the means in a higher rank of esteem than the accomplished end. It is as much as to say that the brickmaker is a more useful member of society than the architect who employs him. The usefulness of the brickmaker is acknowledged, but the rank of him and of the architect are very different.

"No man deserves better of mankind than he who has the art of opening sources of intellectual pleasure and instruction by means of the senses."

On his return from his three years' tour in 1752 Reynolds lost no time in setting up his easel as a professional painter in London. The effects of his studies in Italy were too obvious to escape notice, and

as the arts at that time were scarcely, if at all, deserving of kindlier mention than Reynolds has given them in the passage above quoted, it is hardly surprising that he was subject to some adverse criticism. Hudson, his former master, after looking at a *Boy in a Turban*—a portrait of his pupil Marchi, now one of the treasured possessions of the Royal Academy—which had just been painted, told him that he didn't paint as well as when he left England. A pupil of Kneller objected that he didn't paint in the least like Sir Godfrey. But his success was now not far off, and with the full-length portrait of Keppel, which was painted in 1753, he sprang into fame.

"With this picture," says Farington, in his Memoir of Reynolds published in 1819, "he took great pains; for it was observed at the time that after several sittings he defaced his work and began again. But his labour was not lost; that excellent production was so much admired that it completely established the reputation of the artist. Its dignity and spirit, its beauty of colour and fine general effect occasioned equal surprise and pleasure. The public, hitherto accustomed to see only the formal, tame representations which reduced all persons to the same standard of unmeaning insipidity, were captivated with this

LADY AND CHILD

1780 ? National Gallery, London

display of animated character, and the report of its attraction was soon widely circulated."

Malone is not less enthusiastic. "The whole interval between the time of Charles I and the conclusion of the reign of George II," he observes, "though distinguished by the performances of Lely, Riley, and Kneller, seemed to be annihilated, and the only question was whether the new painter or Vandyck were the more excellent. For several years before the period we are now speaking of the painters of portraits contented themselves with exhibiting as correct a resemblance as they could, but seemed not to have thought, or had not the power, of enlivening the canvas by giving a kind of historic air to their pictures. Mr. Reynolds . . . instead of confining himself to mere likeness (in which, however, he was eminently happy) dived, as it were, into the minds and habits and manners of those who sat to him; and accordingly the majority of his portraits are so appropriate and characteristic that the many illustrious persons whom he has delineated will be almost as well known to posterity as if they had seen and conversed with them."

A slight gap in the story of Reynolds's earlier days

is usefully filled by an essay entitled, "Observations on Sir Joshua Reynolds's Method of Colouring," and published by William Cotton in 1859. It had been written many years before by William Mason, the author of "Odes on Memory" and other poetical works. Mason was, besides, an amateur painter, and was always admitted to Sir Joshua's painting room unless he had a sitter for a portrait. When not so occupied, he tells us, Reynolds was always retouching an old master, or had some beggar or poor child sitting to him, because he always chose to have nature before his eyes. Mason mentions the effect of the portrait of Keppel in attracting others to Reynolds, among the first being the young Lords Huntingdon and Stormont, who had just returned from the grand tour. As though determined to follow up the success of his *Captain Keppel* with as bold an effort in another direction, he challenged comparison with Vandyck by painting the two young lords at full length on the same canvas.

"It was upon seeing this picture," Mason continues, "that Lord Holderness was induced to sit for his portrait (which he was afterwards pleased to make me a present of), on which occasion he employed me to go to the painter and fix with him his Lordship's time of

ADMIRAL KEPPEL

1780. National Gallery, London

sitting. Here our acquaintance commenced; and as he permitted me to attend every sitting, I shall here set down the observations I made upon his manner of painting at this early time, which to the best of my remembrance was in the year 1754.

"On his light-coloured canvas he had already laid a ground of white, where he meant to place the head, and which was still wet. He had nothing upon his palette but flake-white, lake, and black; and without making any previous sketch or outline, he began with much celerity to scumble these pigments together, till he had produced, in less than an hour, a likeness sufficiently intelligible yet withal, as might be expected, cold and pallid to the last degree. At the second sitting he added, I believe, to the three other colours a little Naples yellow; but I do not remember that he used any vermilion, neither then nor at the third trial . . . lake alone might produce the carnation required. However this be, the portrait turned out a striking likeness, and the attitude, so far as a three-quarters canvas would admit, perfectly natural and peculiar to his person, which at all times bespoke a fashioned gentleman. His drapery was crimson velvet, copied from a coat he then wore, and apparently not only painted but glazed with lake,

which has stood at this hour perfectly well; though the face, which as well as the whole picture was highly varnished before he sent it home, very soon faded; and soon after the forehead particularly cracked, almost to peeling off, which it would have done long since had not his pupil Doughty repaired it."

Among Sir Joshua's memoranda is the following very candid account of his efforts to improve himself in his art, which is printed in Beechey's Memoir:

"Not having had the advantage of an early academical education, I never had that facility of drawing the naked figure which an artist ought to have. It appeared to me too late, when I went to Italy and began to feel my own deficiencies, to endeavour to acquire that readiness of invention which I observed others to possess. I consoled myself, however, by remarking that these ready inventors are extremely apt to acquiesce in imperfections, and that if I had not their facility I should for this very reason be more likely to avoid the defect which too often accompanies it—a trite and commonplace mode of invention.

"How difficult it is for the artist who possesses this facility to guard against carelessness and commonplace invention is well known, and in a kindred art

MRS. HOARE AND CHILD

1783? Wallace Collection, London

Metastasio is an eminent instance, who always complained of the great difficulty he found in attaining correctness in consequence of his having been in his youth an *improvisatore*. Having this defect constantly in my mind I never was contented with commonplace attitudes or inventions of any kind. I considered myself as playing a great game, and instead of beginning to save money I laid it out faster than I got it in purchasing the best examples of art that could be procured; for I even borrowed money for this purpose. The possession of pictures by Titian, Vandyck, Rembrandt, &c., I considered as the best kind of wealth.

"By carefully studying the works of great masters this advantage is obtained—we find that certain niceties of expression are capable of being executed which otherwise we might suppose beyond the reach of art. This gives us confidence in ourselves; and we are thus invited to endeavour at not only the same happiness of execution, but also at other congenial excellencies. Study, indeed, consists in learning to see nature, and may be called the art of using other men's minds. By this kind of contemplation and exercise we are taught to think in their way, and sometimes to attain their excellence. Thus, for

MRS. ROBINSON ("PERDITA")

1784? Wallace Collection, London

of English portraiture, and indeed of painting in general. The passages previously quoted from Farington and Malone can hardly be regarded as over-florid when we try to imagine the effect of the sudden appearance of a portrait like that of Captain Orme in a country which was absolutely barren of fine painting. It is true that Hogarth had lately wrought several wonderfully vigorous achievements in unconventional portraiture, one or two of which—notably the *Bishop of Winchester*—are to be seen in an adjoining room at the National Gallery. But Hogarth was never a portrait painter, and admirable as his peculiar qualities were, to compare him with Reynolds is very much like comparing a blacksmith with a sculptor. Hogarth's brush was like a sledge-hammer; every stroke went home, and his extraordinarily vivid presentments of Lord Boyne, Simon Lord Lovat, Captain Coram, and others seem rather to have been forged than painted—I do not, of course, mean counterfeited! Of other portraiture there was really none, beyond the skill of facial resemblance with which Walpole credits Jonathan Richardson, and the lackadaisical reminiscences of what had been worst in Kneller.

Placed among several of the best works of

Reynolds's maturer period, as it is to-day, the *Captain Orme* can hardly fail to arrest the attention alike of student or casual visitor. Whatever technical deficiencies the learned may discover in it—deficiencies which, as we have seen, he was never too ignorant to confess or too indolent to let be—the whole picture is stamped with the character of greatness.

To us there is no strangeness, no surprise, in the originality of the composition, as there was to its first beholders. To us the easy pose of the figure standing beside the horse is only a source of enjoyment, and we feel as it were that there could have been no other possible way of painting the portrait with any success; that that was the one attitude in which Captain Orme appeared to any advantage. We recognise in it the work of a great master without any question as to its place in the history of painting.

But consider what the effect of it must have been on the painters and their patrons at the time of its appearance. Northcote describes the picture as "an effort in composition so new to his barren competitors in art as must have struck them with dismay; for they dared not venture on such perilous flights of invention." That there is little reason to

doubt that Northcote was right in suggesting dismay and timidity as the prevailing emotions of the other painters may be allowed, if but for one moment we can blot out from our minds the existence of all English painting since that time. We can remember the effect produced upon the Academicians by the appearance of Whistler; but in those recent days opinion had been educated to recognise excellencies in painting, and it was only the novelty and disregard of existing convention that disturbed them. In 1750 the painters had had no such education, and they felt the double shock of the revelation of superlative excellence combined with startling novelty.

Not that Reynolds must be regarded in any sense as a revolutionary. It would be truer to say that he was a revivalist. We may smile at Whistler's naïve "Why drag in Velasquez?" but in the "originality" of Reynolds's *Commodore Keppel* and *Captain Orme* we see no more than the fruits of a great mind fertilised by the continuous study of Vandyck and the Italian masters. In a gallery of the great portraits of the world, these achievements of Reynolds would fall as naturally into line with those of the older masters as the regular

productions of the fashionable portrait painters of to-day assimilate with the thousands of pictures amongst which they are hung upon the walls of the Royal Academy. One might have said of them as Shakespeare said of the works of Time:

> "*Thy pyramids built up with newer might*
> *To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,*
> *They are but dressings of a former sight.*"

With all, or even a few, of the splendid series of male portraits, of which these two of Captain Orme and Lord Ligonier may be taken as the beginning, it is impossible to deal in so short a memoir. Among the most magnificent is that of Mr. Fane and his two guardians, from the Earl of Westmorland's collection, which is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. This must have been painted at the best period of Reynolds's career, and shows him at the very top of his achievement in the painting of portraits of men. Not far below it, however, is the *Lord Heathfield*, which is here reproduced. This was one of the last portraits he painted, and yet shows little signs of diminishing vigour in the artist's mind or hand.

The *Lord Heathfield* was exhibited in 1788, with

sixteen other portraits, in addition to the *Infant Hercules*, *Muscipula*, and the *Sleeping Girl*. It is now in the National Gallery, and though it has suffered somewhat from injury and retouching, it forms a noble close to the chapter opened, so to speak, nearly thirty years back by the two other warriors, Orme and Ligonier, with whom we started. Constable, taking it as an example of what a picture may express besides the actual likeness of the sitter, aptly describes it as "almost a history of the defence of Gibraltar. The distant sea with a glimpse of the opposite coast expresses the locality, and the cannon, pointed downward, the height of the rock on which the hero stands, with the chain of the massive key of the fortress twice passed round his hand as to secure it in his grasp. He seems to say, 'I have you, and will keep you!'"

With portraits of women Reynolds was even more successful in his early days. Besides the exhibition of pictures in the April of the year 1761, when the *Captain Orme* and the *Lord Ligonier* opened the public eyes in wonder at the achievements of the new painter, the marriage and coronation of King George III in September contributed, incidentally, to advance

the reputation of Reynolds in the portraiture of women. Of the ten noble and lovely bridesmaids who bore the train of the Queen, three of the most beautiful were painted by him in this year, namely, the Ladies Caroline Russell, Elizabeth Keppel, and Sarah Lenox. The first portrait, which is now at Woburn Abbey, is a half-length; Lady Caroline is seated, in a garden, with a Blenheim spaniel in her lap, presumably the gift of the Duke of Marlborough, whom she married the next year. The other two, at Quidenham and Holland House, are better known from having been mezzotinted. The former is a forecast, as it were, of the famous trio at the National Gallery, Lady Elizabeth being represented at full length, decorating a statue of Hymen. The composition is enriched by the contrast of a negress, who holds up the wreaths of flowers to her mistress.

Lady Sarah Lenox shares the honours of her picture with Lady Susan Strangways and Charles James Fox. She leans from a low window at Holland House to take a dove from Lady Susan, while Fox—then quite a youth—with a manuscript in his hand, urges them to come to a rehearsal of some private theatricals. Of groups such as these it is much to be regretted that Reynolds did not paint

more. With his comprehensive knowledge of the Old Masters he was better qualified than any English painter to attempt them, and his youthful achievement of the Eliot group, already mentioned, showed his natural capabilities before he had been to Italy at all. It was possibly because Hogarth, and his minor imitators, had made the "conversation piece" their own, and that when he did paint a group, as the *Ladies Waldegrave*, or the three ladies decorating a *Term of Hymen*, he saw no way but "the grand style," and sought to immortalise rather than to portray so much beauty collected together. With men he was occasionally more prosaic, as is witnessed by the two groups of the Dilettanti Society, now in the basement of the Grafton Gallery; though we know that in this instance he took Paul Veronese as his guide.

Let us now turn to the other two—Lady Elizabeth Keppel and Lady Caroline Russell—as the prototypes of his more usual portraits of ladies, the whole and the half-length.

A complete full-length picture of a woman offers more difficulties of pose, proportion, light, colour, or any other particular, than are overcome by any but a few of the greatest painters. Holbein has given us the Duchess of Milan, and no more; and of all the

full-length portraits of Elizabeth and the ladies of her time, how many are there that have any but historical or personal interest? In England Vandyck alone succeeded in painting a picture of a complete woman, and when he was gone the chance of immortality for women—I mean in pictures—was gone too. I can recall no single whole-length portrait of Lely or Kneller that is anything more than a conventional representation of the person.

With the *Lady Elizabeth Keppel* we are back to Vandyck again. With a painter who could achieve a portrait like this, woman once again had the chance of pictorial salvation, and like the sensible creature that she is, jumped at it without any hesitation. To sit for her portrait was now no longer a duty to her family, a bore, or at best a mere vanity, but a thrill.

Mrs. Bonfoy, one of the daughters of Lord Eliot in the family group of 1746, was among the first to experience it, sitting to Reynolds again for a half-length in 1754. This portrait is still at Port Eliot, and is described by Leslie as "one of his most beautiful female portraits, and in perfect preservation. The lady is painted as a half-length in a green dress, with one hand on her hip, and the head turned, with that inimitable ease and high-

LORD HEATHFIELD

1787. National Gallery, London

bred grace of which Reynolds was a master beyond all the painters who ever painted women." This is indeed high praise for what was probably the first female portrait he painted after his return from Italy. But there is no doubt that Reynolds had now acquired enough mastery over his "ignorance" to be capable of producing work which would be comparable with anything he was to do in the future. Tom Taylor notes another half-length painted in the spring of the following year in hardly less glowing terms; it is of Mrs. Molesworth—"a young and lovely brunette, in one of the quaint every-day dresses of the time, closely copied, without the least attempt at 'idealising' or 'generalising,' with flowers in her hand, a little cap on her head, a prim apron, and a lawn kerchief closely covering her shoulders. It is one of the most attractive of his female portraits, and especially valuable for its literalness."

That his very earliest works should receive, and indeed deserve, such commendation requires emphasising in order to restore to him a good deal of the credit for the revival of portraiture in England which nowadays is given to his only successful rivals, Gainsborough and Romney. The fascination

that Gainsborough's natural genius throws over his admirers—and Reynolds himself was not entirely unaffected by it—is apt to blind them to the more solid merit of the other, and the fact that Reynolds had achieved so much before Gainsborough had really started painting portraits is apt to be overlooked. In 1751, when Sir Joshua had fairly established his reputation, Gainsborough had only just left his native place and settled in Bath, and it was not until 1774—twenty-one years after Reynolds—that he came to London and seriously competed with him for the public favour. Romney, again, although he was working in London as early as 1761, was never a serious competitor till his return from a two years' tour in Italy in 1775. For twenty years at least then Reynolds had practically as complete a monopoly of portraiture among the nobility as Kneller had had at the opening of the century, and we have only to think once in forming our estimate of the use he made of it. Scattered throughout our old country mansions in England are hundreds of his works, occasionally in groups as at Lord Lansdowne's at Bowood, or Lord Albemarle's at Quidenham, few of which are not prized by their owners as the chief glory of their possessions.

In our public galleries are a few comparatively—for the number of his authentic pictures enumerated by Sir Walter Armstrong is something over a thousand—but such as they are, they take their place unquestioned among those of the great masters. Never was an aristocracy more fortunate in their painter.

But youth and beauty and the immortality conferred by Sir Joshua were not exclusive privileges of the nobility. To Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Captain Keppel, Reynolds owed the beginning of his patronage in Court circles, but to the latter he was also indebted for the acquaintance of one of his fairest sitters, Kitty Fisher, the daughter of a German staymaker, who was the most celebrated Traviata of her time. For her biography the reader may refer to Mr. Horace Bleackley's "Ladies Fair and Frail." She first sat to Reynolds in April 1759, the portrait being commissioned by Sir Charles Bingham, who was afterwards created Lord Lucan. At that time she was barely twenty years old, and was under the protection of Captain Keppel. Old Lord Ligonier was also one of her many admirers, and is said to have conspired with the King in playing off a joke at the expense of Pitt (Lord Chatham) by introducing Kitty to him at a review in Hyde

Park as a foreign Duchess. The King fell in with the idea, and, looking towards Kitty, asked aloud who she was. "Oh, Sir," said the old General, "the Duchess of N——, a foreign lady that the Secretary should know." "Well, well," said the King, "introduce him." Lord Ligonier took Pitt up to her and said, "This is Mr. Secretary Pitt—this is Miss Kitty Fisher." Pitt behaved very well, and without showing the least embarrassment, told her he was sorry he had not known her when he was younger. "For then, Madame," he concluded, "I should have had the hope of succeeding in your affections; but old and infirm as you now see me I have no other way of avoiding the force of such beauty but by flying from it," and then hobbled off.

Leslie mentions having seen as many as five portraits of Kitty, which must all have been painted about the same time. In one, a three-quarter length, she holds a dove in her lap. Of this there are three versions, one of which belongs to Earl Crewe, and another to Mr. Lenox of New York (1865).

Another portrait of Kitty is in the possession of Lord Leconfield, at Petworth, Sussex. In this she is leaning with folded arms on a table, facing the painter. This, and a fifth, as Cleopatra dissolving a

pearl, are better known by having been mezzotinted. Tom Taylor mentions two more, one belonging to Lord Lansdowne, in profile with a parrot on her forefinger, and another, which he considers the loveliest of all, belonging to Lord Carysfort—an unfinished head in powder and a fly-cap.

Within a couple of years (1761) Reynolds was painting Kitty's rival, the fascinating Nelly O'Brien, with apparently as much relish and assiduity and even more success. In 1763 he painted the exquisite picture of her which is here reproduced from the original at Hertford House.

It is odd to think of Sir Joshua engaged in painting portrait after portrait of these fascinating but frail ladies with the same care, the same thoroughness, and the same wonderful breadth and seriousness as any of the men and women whose names were foremost in the growing culture and dignity of the nation. With Nelly O'Brien we know that he dined, and the only reason to suppose that he was not on easy terms of familiarity with any of them—if it can be called a reason—is the general dignity of his mind and deportment, as evidenced by his relations with Dr. Johnson, the Burney family, and all the great and learned people of his time. The main thing, however,

to be considered is that as an artist he made no difference between the virtuous and the frail. That he was paid for painting them need hardly be mentioned, as that has nothing whatever to do with the question. But that he was as much in earnest with these commissions as with any other is a proof of the perfect balance of his mind, which in view of his sometimes over-academical dignity has rather escaped notice.

In 1770, by which time he was President of the Royal Academy and a knight, he was painting a portrait of Polly Kennedy—for the details of whose tragic history I may again refer the readers to Mr. Bleackley's book—for Sir Charles Bunbury. "Among the rich collection of pictures by Reynolds at Barton," says Leslie, "is one representing a young and handsome woman, with aquiline features, marked by the tension of anxiety. One hand is raised and holds a handkerchief. The dress is a rich robe of flowered scarlet and silver brocade, worn over an inner vest of bright colours, with a shawl of green and gold round the waist. It looks like the portrait of an actress, but the veiled look of pain does not belong to the stage; it is meant, I believe, to tell a tale of real and prolonged suffering."

Whether or not Leslie's conjecture is justified, it is certain that Sir Joshua wrote to Sir Charles Bunbury about the picture in terms which leave no doubt as to the pains he was at in executing the commission:

Sept. 1770

Dear Sir,—I have finished the face very much to my own satisfaction. It has more grace and dignity than anything I have ever done, and it is the best coloured. As to the dress, I should be glad it might be left undetermined till I return from my fortnight's tour. When I return I will try different dresses. The Eastern dresses are very rich, and have one sort of dignity; but 'tis a mock dignity in comparison with the simplicity of the antique. The impatience I have to finish it will shorten my stay in the country. I shall set out in an hour's time.

I am with the greatest respect,

Your most obliged servant,

J. Reynolds.

In the Exhibition of 1784 there appeared the famous *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, of which Sir Joshua painted two if not three originals. One is at Grosvenor House, having been purchased in

1822 by the first Marquis of Westminster for 1760 guineas. (At the sale of Reynolds's pictures in 1796 it fetched £700.) Another is in the Dulwich Gallery, and a third was given by Sir Joshua to Mr. Harvey, of Langley Park, Stowe, in exchange for a picture of a boar hunt by Snyders, which he admired very much. The Dulwich replica (which, according to Northcote, was painted by one of Reynolds's assistants) was sold by Reynolds in 1789 to M. Desenfans—whose collection formed the bulk of the pictures now in the Dulwich Gallery—for £735.

In this portrait, for once, we can find a certain reminiscence of Reynolds's visit to Rome, namely in the resemblance of the attitude to that of Michel Angelo's *Isaiah* and the two attendant figures. It is recorded that Mrs. Siddons herself told Mr. Phillips "that it was the production of pure accident: Sir Joshua had begun the head and figure in a different view, but while he was occupied in the preparation of some colour she changed her position to look at a picture hanging on the wall of the room. When he again looked at her and saw the action she had assumed he requested her not to move, and thus arose the beautiful and expressive figure we now see in the picture." But it is easy to understand that a

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

1788. National Gallery, London

slight turn of the head and a complete change of the expression, which would involve no alteration in the general pose, is enough to account for this anecdote. Mrs. Siddons is also reputed to have told a Miss Fanshawe, in whose journal the statement is preserved, that she did not think that Sir Joshua painted the duplicate now at Grosvenor House, but that the original was at Dulwich. This contradicts Northcote, and we may reasonably question Miss Fanshawe's accuracy. Mrs. Siddons very possibly said a great deal about her picture which listeners were not concerned to take too literally, but we should like to believe her implicitly when she said that Sir Joshua intended to work considerably more on the face, but that on her telling him that she thought it quite perfect he deferred to her judgment, and left it as it was at the last sitting.

A misunderstanding as to the engraving of this picture occasioned a letter from Reynolds which is so characteristic of his thoroughness in anything he undertook, as well as being an enjoyable relief in contrast with some of the rather pedantic passages in his "Discourses" and memoranda, that no excuse is needed for reprinting it in full. Valentine Green, its unfortunate recipient, had asked for permission to

engrave the picture, and Reynolds had politely told him that his application "should certainly be remembered." Mrs. Siddons soon afterwards wrote a note to Reynolds expressing a wish that Howard should engrave it, and Sir Joshua very naturally consented. Green then wrote a long and indignant letter to Reynolds, and here is the reply.

Sir,—You have the pleasure, if it is any pleasure to you, of reducing me to the most mortifying situation. I must either treat your accusation with the contempt of silence (which you and your friends may think pleading guilty) or I must submit to vindicate myself like a criminal from a charge given in the most imperious manner; and this charge no less than that of being a liar.

I mentioned in conversation the last time I had the honour of seeing you at my house that Mrs. Siddons had wrote a note to me respecting the print. That note, as I expected to be believed, I never dreamt of showing; and I now blush at being forced to send it in my own vindication. This I am forced to do as you are pleased to say in your letter that Mrs. Siddons never did write or even speak to me in favour of any artist.

MRS. BRADDYL

1788 or 1789. Wallace Collection, London

But supposing Mrs. Siddons out of the question, my words (on which you ground your demand of doing the print as a right, not as a favour) I do not see can be interpreted as such an absolute promise; they mean only, in the common acceptation, that you, being the person who first applied, that circumstance should not be forgot—that it should turn the scale in your favour, supposing an equality in other respects.

You say you wait the result of my determination. What sort of determination can you expect after such a letter? You have been so good as to give me a piece of advice—for the future to give unequivocal answers; I shall immediately follow it, and do now, in the most unequivocal manner, inform you that you shall not do the print.

With purely historical and subject pictures Sir Joshua may be said to have increased his popularity more than his reputation. Of this class there are comparatively few, for while Malone enumerates one hundred and ten in "a general list of the most considerable," no less than thirty-five of these are primarily portraits, such as *The Graces adorning a Term of Hymen*, *The Marlborough Family*, &c. &c. And while we acknowledge some of his very finest

achievements to be portraits and portrait groups treated in this allegorical manner, when we turn to the "fancy subjects" we find little of which the importance is equal to its sentimental charm.

Nor are the most notable exceptions, as might be expected, those for which he received the largest commissions, namely: *The Infant Hercules*, £1500; *The Nativity*, £1200; *Macbeth*, £1000; *Cardinal Beaufort*, £500; *The Continence of Scipio*, £500; *A Holy Family*, £500; *Count Hugolino*, £400; *A Gipsy Telling Fortunes* £350; *Tuccia, the Vestal Virgin*, £300.

The Infant Hercules was commenced in January 1786, at a time, that is to say, when he was at the very height of his power. His niece, Miss Palmer, writing to a cousin abroad during this month, says: "My uncle seems more bewitched than ever with his pallet and pencils. He is painting from morning till night, and the truth is that every picture that he does seems better than the former. He is just going to begin a picture for the Empress of Russia, who has sent to desire he will paint her an historical one. The subject is left to his own choice, and at present he is undetermined what to choose."

The picture is now in St. Petersburg, and we

MRS. SIDDONS AS THE TRAGIC MUSE

1789. Dulwich Gallery

only know it from engravings. Tom Taylor considered it "a confused straggling picture, quite beyond the power of the painter to manage." But this is scarcely the criticism it deserves, and we prefer the more adulatory notices of his contemporaries. In the Exhibition of 1788—the last but two in which Reynolds was represented—it was hung over the chimney-piece. "It was the first picture which presented itself on entering the room," says Northcote, "and had the most splendid effect of any picture I ever saw. . . . It was a large and grand composition, and in respect to beauty, colour, and expression was equal to any picture known in the world. The middle group, which received the principal light, was exquisite in the highest degree." James Barry was no less enthusiastic over it: "Nothing can exceed the brilliancy of light, the force and vigorous effect . . . it possesses all that we look for and are accustomed to admire in Rembrandt, united to beautiful forms and to an elevation of mind to which Rembrandt had no pretensions; the prophetical agitation of Tiresias and Juno, enveloped with clouds, hanging over the scene like a black pestilence, can never be too much admired, and is, indeed, truly sublime."

The Nativity, which he painted in 1779, was purchased by the Duke of Rutland at the then unheard of price of £1200. Unfortunately it perished in a fire at Belvoir Castle, and we only know it from the engraving, and from the rendering of it in glass by Jervas as the central part of the western window of New College, Oxford. But it is doubtful whether the loss is as great as it is deplorable, in view of the opinions expressed by at least two not unfriendly critics. Mason tells us that "the day of opening the Exhibition that year when the picture was in hand approached too hastily upon Sir Joshua, who had resolved that it should then make its public appearance. I saw him at work upon it, even the very day before it was to be sent thither; and it grieved me to see him laying loads of colour and varnish upon it . . ." Benjamin Haydon when the whole series was exhibited in 1821, allowing that they are unequalled by any series of allegorical designs painted by an English master, and that the *Charity* in particular is "very lovely," and "may take its place triumphantly by any Correggio on earth," is merciless to *The Nativity*. He condemns it for "having emptiness as breadth, plastering for surface, and portrait individuality for general nature."

The *Macbeth*, which was commenced just a year after *The Infant Hercules*, was a commission from Alderman Boydell—half of which, by-the-by, was paid in advance—as part of the scheme for the Shakespeare Gallery. The *Cardinal Beaufort* was the same. Neither can be said to have advanced Sir Joshua's reputation or even his popularity as much as the *Puck*, which was purchased by Boydell for inclusion in the Shakespeare series, although not originally intended for it.

The Continence of Scipio followed the *Hercules* to Russia. The *Holy Family*, which was commissioned by Macklin for a Bible illustration, has lately been restored and rehung in the National Gallery. It was for long supposed to have suffered beyond repair, but the restorer, if he has not done too much to it, has certainly not done too little, and it now presents an appearance which attracts to it a greater amount of attention from the casual visitor than from the student.

In his minor works of this class, however, there is much more both to charm and to satisfy. If his children have not quite the same spontaneous gaiety of Gainsborough's, they have many other qualities and distinctions which Gainsborough's lack.

With the *Heads of Angels* and *The Age of Innocence* Reynolds is sure of his public in any period.

The Strawberry Girl, as Sir Joshua always maintained, was one of the "half-dozen original things" which he declared no man ever exceeded in his life's work. He repeated the picture several times. Lord Carysfort bought the original from the Exhibition of 1773 for £50, but at the sale of Samuel Rogers' collection it was bought by the Marquis of Hertford for 2100 guineas.

To realise the full extent of England's debt to Reynolds one must read his "Discourses" as well as look at his pictures. It is in passages such as the concluding paragraph of his farewell address to the Academy students that we find the real secrets of his success. Speaking of Michel Angelo, he says: "It will not, I hope, be thought presumptuous in me to appear in the train, I cannot say of his imitators, but of his admirers. I have taken another course, one more suited to my abilities and to the taste of the times in which I live. Yet however unequal I feel myself to that attempt, were I now to begin the world

MRS. NESBIT WITH A DOVE

Wallace Collection, London

again I would tread in the steps of that great master; to kiss the hem of his garment, to catch the slightest of his perfections would be glory and distinction enough for an ambitious man.

"I feel a self-congratulation in knowing myself capable of such sensations as he intended to excite. I reflect, not without vanity, that these discourses bear testimony of my admiration of that truly divine man, and I should desire that the last words which I should pronounce in this Academy and from this place might be the name of—Michel Angelo."

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